

COUNTY:

Virginia Beach (city)

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY DATE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(NATIONAL HISTORIC

LANDMARK) (Type all entries complete applicable sections)

## 1. NAME

COMMON:

Cape Henry Lighthouse

AND/OR HISTORIC:

Cape Henry Lighthouse

## 2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:

Fort Story, U.S. 60 and Atlantic Avenue

CITY OR TOWN:

Virginia Beach

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

Second

STATE

Virginia 23459

CODE

51

COUNTY:

Virginia Beach (city)

CODE

810

## 3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY  
(Check One)

- ☐ District ☐ Building  
☐ Site ☒ Structure  
☐ Object

OWNERSHIP

- ☒ Public  
☐ Private  
☐ Both

Public Acquisition:

- ☐ In Process  
☐ Being Considered

STATUS

- ☐ Occupied  
☒ Unoccupied  
☐ Preservation work  
in progress

ACCESSIBLE  
TO THE PUBLIC

- Yes:  
☐ Restricted  
☒ Unrestricted  
☐ No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Agricultural ☐ Government ☐ Park ☐ Transportation ☐ Comments  
☐ Commercial ☐ Industrial ☐ Private Residence ☐ Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Educational ☐ Military ☐ Religious \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Entertainment ☐ Museum ☐ Scientific \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:

Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities

STREET AND NUMBER:

c/o John Marshall Hotel

CITY OR TOWN:

Richmond

STATE:

Virginia

CODE

51

## 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:

City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

Virginia Beach

STATE

Virginia 23458

CODE

51

## 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory

DATE OF SURVEY:

1958

- ☒ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

Library of Congress/Annex

STREET AND NUMBER:

Prints and Photographs Division

CITY OR TOWN:

Washington

STATE:

D.C.

CODE

11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Virginia  
COUNTY: Virginia  
Beach (city)  
ENTRY NUMBER:  
DATE:

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## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Cape Henry Lighthouse is an octagonal sandstone structure, faced with hewn and hammer-dressed stone. The diameter is twenty-six feet at the lighthouse base and sixteen and one-half feet at its top, seventy-two feet above the base, where the walls are six feet thick. A small, glass-encased observation platform caps the tower walls. The lighthouse is situated on top of a small, steep sand dune, covered with low, dense vegetation. The height of the dune equals that of the lighthouse.

Wind erosion at one time threatened to undermine the lighthouse foundations, but the necessary repairs were made following the acquisition of the lighthouse in 1930 by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA). Brick lining and an iron stairway have been added to the interior.

Today the lighthouse is open to the public on an unlimited basis by the APVA; a fine view of the Chesapeake can be enjoyed from its observation platform.

BOUNDARIES

The original land grant by the Virginia Assembly to the Federal Government in 1789 was for "not more than two acres." Somehow, the lighthouse was built only partially on the land provided. This situation was finally rectified in 1881, when additional land was furnished (as represented on accompanying map A; dotted lines describe the 1789 boundaries, solid lines the 1881 boundaries). In 1930 the old tower and 1.77 acres of surrounding land were transferred to the APVA.

The boundary is shown by the red line on the accompanying map B entitled "Cape Henry Light Station, Va." and dated January 31, 1925. The 1.77 acre landmark is bounded by a roughly triangular line specifically delineated on the map as "Plot A-B-C-D-E-F containing approx. 1.77 acres of land to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities."

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## 8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Pre-Columbian☐ 16th Century☒ 18th Century☐ 20th Century☐ 15th Century☐ 17th Century☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

1792-1881

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Aboriginal☐ Education☐ Political☐ Urban Planning☐ Prehistoric☐ Engineering☐ Religion/Phi-☒ Other (Specify)☐ Historic☐ Industry☐ losophy(Travel and  
Communications)☐ Agriculture☐ Invention☐ Science☐ Architecture☐ Landscape☐ Sculpture☐ Art☐ Architecture☐ Social/Human-☐ Commerce☐ Literature☐ itarian☐ Communications☐ Military☐ Theater☐ Conservation☐ Music☐ Transportation

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Cape Henry Lighthouse was the first structure authorized and completed by the newly organized Federal Government in 1789. It was the first material proof of the advantages of a strong national authority.

Cape Henry Lighthouse is an octagonal sandstone structure, faced with hewn and hammer-dressed stone; it is the third oldest lighthouse in America, having been completed in 1792.

HISTORY:

From early colonial times Chesapeake Bay had boasted a substantial volume of shipping. For decades, however, efforts at gaining the benefits of a lighthouse were unsuccessful. The division of the Bay between Virginia and Maryland made unified action difficult; the comparative regularity of the Virginia coast made the need for a lighthouse seem less pressing; and there was difficulty in reaching agreement among all the many interested, and often conflicting, parties--the Virginia and Maryland Assemblies, the British Government, Lord Baltimore, and British mercantile interests. The lighthouse was not erected until the establishment of the Federal Government. Then it became the first whose authorization and complete construction were undertaken.

The oil-burning lamps of the Cape Henry Lighthouse were first lit in October 1792. The light at Cape Henry shone with great dependability for 89 years, until it was replaced by a new lighthouse some 350 feet southeast of the original one in December of 1881.

After the new light was put into operation, the old tower remained a day-mark and a basis for coast survey triangulation. On April 26, 1896 the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities placed a tablet on it marking the first landing of English colonists on Virginia soil. The old tower thus became a forerunner of the Cape Henry Memorial.

The greater significance of Cape Henry Lighthouse derives from its position as the first material proof of the advantages of a Federal Government. A badly needed lighthouse remained unbuilt for decades due to the squabblings of State governments and local interests. With the creation of a strong national authority, construction was begun almost immediately. Cape Henry Lighthouse is a monument to the benefits of centralized power judiciously handled.

## 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Hatch, Charles M., Jr., The Old Cape Henry Light (unpublished, ms. report, NPS, 1962).

U.S. Coast Guard, Historically Famous Lighthouses (Washington, GPO, 1950).

## 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES	
CORNER	LATITUDE Degrees Minutes Seconds	LONGITUDE Degrees Minutes Seconds			
NW	0 0 0	0 0 0			
NE	0 0 0	0 0 0			
SE	0 0 0	0 0 0			
SW	0 0 0	0 0 0			

UTM  
18.410200.4086900

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1.77

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

## 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Stephen Lissandrello, Historian, Landmarks Review Project	
ORGANIZATION Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service	DATE 2/17/75
STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street NW.	
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE D.C.
	CODE 11

## 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

## NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

Designated: Jan 29, 1969  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Boundary Certified:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chf. Insp. & Arch. Surveys

Secretary Assisted:

Keeper of the National Register

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Director, OHP

CAPE HENRY LIGHTHOUSE

UTM

Cape Henry, Va. USGS 7.5'

18.410200.4086900

